

Some Notable Syrian Missionaries



Women's Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church
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In these days of kodaks and snap-shots, of haste and publicity, the journal-keeping habit has almost disappeared, but it is a great pleasure to dip occasionally into the pages of one of these old-time records and find there revealed the inmost life-history of some rare and interesting individuality. Pliny Fisk, in his student days at Middlebury and Andover, kept a journal and in it discusses frankly the arguments for and against the realization of his dreams of missionary service. "I am blessed," he says, "with a good memory, good health, quickness of perception, but have not depth of thought nor originality of genius." Then, too, notwithstanding his fervent desire to go as a missionary, he feels keenly, we find, the struggle involved in the choice between the

comforts and pleasures of home and Christian social life and the desire to go to the heathen, but he finally concludes, "I know there are many hardships and dangers to be endured, many trials to be encountered, many temptations to be resisted. I know I must leave my dear friends, my beloved country, the enjoyment of civilized society, and risk my life, my happiness and my reputation, but still I desire to trust my Saviour and go."

At a meeting of the American Board of Missions at Andover in 1818, a resolution was unanimously adopted, "That a mission be established in Palestine," and, "on the same day," to quote the report, "Messrs. Parsons and Fisk were appointed to that station."

On November 3, 1819, these two young men, young crusaders of a later day, set sail, not with the idea, to be sure, of recovering the Holy Sepulchre, but with the intention of using their utmost efforts to plant the standard of the Cross in the land from which it had so long been absent.

In about a month they arrived at Smyrna, hired a little room, and at once commenced the study of Arabic. They had been commissioned by the American Board to make a thorough investigation of the country to which they had been sent and report upon it. With this end in view, the friends set out on a tour of some three hundred miles, visiting in the course of their travels the places where once stood the Seven Churches of Asia. During their tour they distributed Testaments, and wherever they had an opportunity talked with the natives about religion.

A year after their arrival, Mr. Parsons, the first Protestant missionary to reside there,

went to Jerusalem; but Syria, a part of the Turkish Empire, was at that time feeling seriously the effects of the Greek Revolution, and Jerusalem was so filled with turbulence and suspicion that it was impossible to gain any footing there, and, much discouraged, Parsons went back to Smyrna, where Fisk had remained doing much active work. In the following year young Levi Parsons—he was only twenty-nine years old—died at Alexandria and lies buried there in the churchyard of the Greek convent.

After the death of his friend and companion, Mr. Fisk went with Jonas King, afterwards known for his labors in Greece, to Jerusalem, and there preached and taught for two years, but without any great measure of success. In a letter to a friend at Andover, he says, "I have not much to say about our mission. I often think of Dr. Porter's remark: 'You must go prepared to spend ten years climbing up a smooth, perpendicular rock.'" He continued to make

tours of investigation and to distribute Bibles, psalters and tracts, but, notwithstanding all his efforts, he could accomplish nothing in the city of Jerusalem itself. All the region, and particularly the city, were in such a state of disturbance and political uproar that nothing could be done, and the missionaries withdrew. Pliny Fisk went to Beirût and died there in 1824. He is buried at the foot of Mt. Lebanon. He left to the mission the results of his labors in surveying the field, and over a wide territory had scattered the good seed which was destined ultimately to bear so rich a harvest.

The station at Jerusalem was now abandoned, and Beirût, which Fisk had suggested as an excellent place for a station, became soon after the center of missionary activity. In 1823 William Goodell and Isaac Bird had come to Beirût with their wives and begun the translation and distribution of Christian literature. From its very beginning their work met with a certain measure of success,



REV. WILLIAM GOODELL AND WIFE

but they, too, soon felt so seriously the disturbed condition of the country that they decided to transfer their work for awhile to Malta. Persecutions had continued for two years and had proved so serious that Mr. Goodell, in writing to a friend at this time, said: "We almost nod now and then to see whether our heads are on our shoulders." When Mr. Bird and his wife returned to Beirût in 1830, the whole Protestant community of the Turkish Empire, *five* in number, came out to meet them in a small row-boat. It is an interesting commentary on the work of missions and on the apparently fruitless lives of Fisk and Parsons that the number of Protestant Christians now in the Turkish Empire is over seventy-five thousand.

In 1834, the Arabic portion of the Mission Printing Press was removed to Beirût under the charge of Rev. Eli Smith, who had begun the translation of the Bible. Upon the death of Dr. Smith this work was under-

taken by Dr. Cornelius Van Alen Van Dyck, a man sent out by the American Board in 1840, and equally distinguished as physician, as educator and as author; a missionary hero, who for fifty-five years devoted himself to the service of Christ. He founded the Abeih Academy in Mt. Lebanon, prepared text-books for the mission schools, and was for many years a teacher in the Syrian-Protestant College at Beirût. He wrote books on Chemistry, Algebra and Geometry. He translated into Arabic *The Schönberg-Cotta Family*, *Ben Hur* and D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation*. He prepared a set of science-primers for Syrian young people. But his great work was the translation of the Bible into Arabic, a work which had already occupied Eli Smith for eight years and upon which he spent eight years more. In 1865 the first copy was printed, America's gift to the Mohammedan world, the most perfect translation of the Bible into any language. The completion of the Arabic



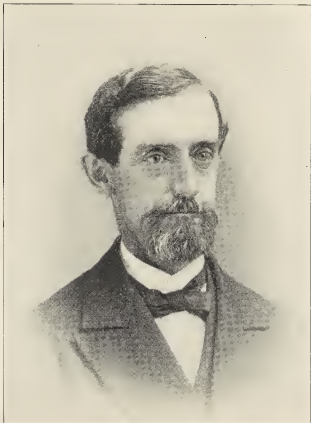
BEIRÛT AND MOUNT LEBANON

Bible was celebrated in the upper room of the old American Press Building, where Dr. Smith and Dr. Van Dyck had labored for so many years, and a tablet commemorating the event was placed in the wall by President Gilman of Johns Hopkins University. While in New York superintending the making of the electroplates for the entire Bible, Dr. Van Dyck taught Hebrew in Union Seminary. His scholarship was widely recognized, and the University of Edinburgh conferred the degree of LL.D. upon him. His tenderness and gentleness of character greatly endeared him to the Syrians among whom he worked, and in his jubilee year they testified their affection by many gifts, among which was a purse of two thousand dollars.

In a quarter of a century after our missionaries had entered Syria, so subtly and yet so strongly had Christianity made itself felt, that a *firman* was issued decreeing that Christians of all sects were to be free from

persecution. Three years later a Protestant Charter of Rights guaranteed to Protestant Christians all the rights and privileges of other Christian sects, and in February, 1857, a famous imperial edict announced that no Mohammedan becoming a Christian should be put to death.

In this time of greater liberty and greater possibilities of growth there came to Syria a missionary, a native of New York and a graduate of Union Seminary, who had refused many flattering offers at home because his heart longed for the work in Syria. Arriving in 1851, William Eddy and his wife went first to Aleppo, where they had been assigned, and later to Sidon, where for twenty-one years they did a most wonderful work. Churches and schools which still exert a wide influence were organized by them. In 1878 Dr. Eddy was called as an instructor to the Theological Seminary at Beirût. Since the return of Dr. James S. Dennis to this country Dr. Eddy has had much to do



DR. WILLIAM EDDY, D.D.

in aiding and editing periodicals. He has written an Arabic commentary upon the New Testament, and when he died last January was engaged upon a commentary upon the Old Testament. His children, Rev. William K. Eddy (and his wife), Mrs. Hoskins (and her husband), his famous daughter, Dr. Mary K. Eddy, his wife and himself, have given together an aggregate of over two hundred years of Christian service to Syria. Such careers seem to invest life with new significance and commend the missionary career as the highest type of service to humanity.

Prominent among the living missionaries of Syria is Dr. Henry Harris Jessup, a graduate of Yale College and of Union Seminary. Declining many tempting offers to remain in this country, Dr. Jessup went out to Syria under the American Board, as did all our missionaries prior to 1870. When he returned to this country in 1857 to marry Miss Caroline Brush of Branchport, N. Y., he

was offered the Professorship of Old Testament Literature at Union Seminary and an important pastorate near New York, but his heart was in the work across the sea, and, returning to Syria in 1858, he became closely identified with every department of Christian work as carried on by our missionaries in Beirût: educational, theological, editorial, evangelistic work, the drudgery of translating, all, were familiar to him. In 1865, Princeton conferred upon him the degree of D.D., and when, in 1870, the Syrian Mission was transferred to the Presbyterian Board, he was elected Secretary, but declined to give up his active missionary work. He was elected Moderator of the General Assembly which met at Saratoga in 1875, and in 1883 he was asked to accept an appointment as United States Ambassador by President Arthur. All these and many other honors, tempting to most men of distinguished ability, have been apparently no temptation to one who seems to covet no honor beyond the



THE SYRIAN PROTESTANT COLLEGE

MAIN BUILDING SYRIAN PROTESTANT COLLEGE. MEDICAL BUILDING TO LEFT

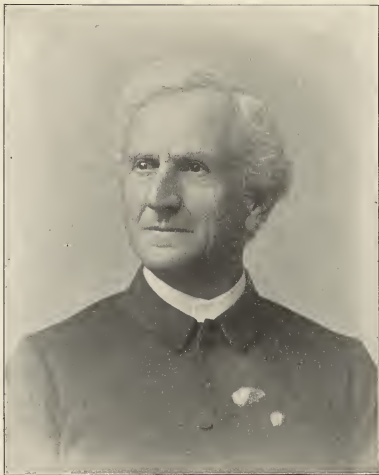
"Well done, good and faithful servant," of the Master whom he serves.

In 1869 a Theological Seminary was opened in Abeih with the Rev. Simeon Calhoun, of sainted memory, in charge, assisted by Dr. Jessup and Rev. William W. Eddy. Three years later the seminary was removed to Beirût and, owing to the resignation of Dr. Calhoun, Dr. Dennis was appointed in his place.

In 1870 the Syria Mission was transferred from the A. B. C. F. M. of Boston to the Presbyterian Board of New York, and has continued to grow in strength and influence. One of the most marked influences for good has been the Syrian Protestant College at Beirût, which, though not under the Presbyterian Board, is the direct outgrowth of missionary work and closely connected with it. The corner-stone of the college building was laid on December 7, by Mr. William E. Dodge, of New York. Under the presidency of that "grand old man," Dr. Daniel Bliss,

this college, which began some forty years ago with only sixteen students, has now over five hundred. It has ten stone buildings, a large library, an astronomical observatory, extensive scientific apparatus, collections and laboratories. It includes a medical department, a preparatory department and a school of commerce. Mr. Mott says, "No college has within one generation accomplished a greater work or has to-day a larger opportunity than the Syrian Protestant College. It has practically created the medical profession in the Levant. It has been and is the center for genuine Christian and scientific literature and learning in all that region."

Our pioneer missionaries, Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons, died without seeing any fruit of their labors; their lives were apparent failures. But seventy years have passed, and as a result of their teachings Christianity has gained a foothold in the Turkish Empire and bravely holds her place. The tiny ever-green tree planted by the grave of Fisk in



DR. DANIEL BLISS
PRESIDENT SYRIAN PROTESTANT COLLEGE

the suburbs of Beirût, then a town of eight thousand people, has grown to be a stately cypress in the very center of a city of ninety thousand inhabitants. Overlooking it is a female seminary, a large church, a Sunday-school, and a printing house which sends out annually more than twenty million pages. Within a radius of two miles are four Christian colleges, seven girls' boarding-schools, sixty boys' day-schools, thirty-one girls' day-schools, seventeen printing presses and four large hospitals.

While visiting a Protestant school in Athens one morning, one of the ladies in charge said to me, "We must take the light to this people; they gave it to us." Her thought is, I believe, echoed by many Christians, who long to return in gratitude to the Orient the blessing of spiritual enlightenment. The efforts made to carry the gospel to the people of Syria have been greatly blessed. Religious liberty and freedom of conscience have been secured in a measure, and the con-

dition of women has been greatly improved. The young Syrian women, who were formerly shut away from the world in ignorance and illiteracy, now go to school, read books and even engage in discussions in the public press. Owing to the influence of the American schools there has been a great intellectual awakening all through Syria, a sort of renaissance of learning, in which the Bible is the book best known and most studied. In Syria to-day not only may the Bible be bought in any language of the Empire, but other books may be found as well, for *Robinson Crusoe*, *Mother Goose* and *Black Beauty* have been translated for children, and for older people are translations of Bunyan, D'Aubigne, Edwards, Alexander, Moody and Spurgeon, while newspapers and magazines contribute to the general intelligence and information of the people.

In no other foreign field, perhaps, have so many learned men devoted themselves to the work of foreign missions as in Syria—such



MEDITERRANEAN FROM OBSERVATORY

men as Drs. Smith and Van Dyck; Dr. Robinson, who wrote *Researches in Palestine*; Dr. Thompson, who wrote *The Land and the Book*; Dr. Post, who, after twelve years of study, contributed to the science of botany his *Flora of Palestine and Syria*; Dr. Dennis, to whose book, *Christian Missions and Social Progress*, every missionary worker turns for information; Dr. Eddy, who wrote commentaries on the Old and New Testaments, as well as Drs. Wortabet and Bistany, native workers and scholars. Among the educators, in addition to those already named, Rev. Frank Wood and Gerald F. Dale, founders of the Zahleh Mission, should be mentioned. It was the latter of whom Dr. Hodge said that he was "the model scholar, the model Christian, the model gentleman of Princeton." These men and many others have deeply impressed the intellectual life of the people with whom they came in contact.

But notwithstanding the work of devoted men and women, notwithstanding the evidences on every hand of intellectual growth and spiritual progress, much yet remains to be done in Syria. "We must not forget," says Mr. Hoskins, of the Zahleh Mission, "that Christianity is no longer a child, but a spirit and a power grappling in a death-struggle against the powers of earth and hell in this land. When the churches at home clearly realize that every victory won for Christianity in this New Land of Promise will be felt to the ends of the Mohammedan world, they will pray for Syria as they should," that His Word may go forth, undermining ignorance and superstition, and building upon firm foundations the Kingdom of Righteousness in which shall reign the peace and good-will sung by the angels on the first Christmas Eve, in this land of the Saviour's birth.

Comparatively little has been published concerning the Syria Mission. It is therefore interesting to know that a full account of the life and work of Dr. Simeon H. Calhoun, one of the best loved of the Syrian missionaries, has been written by Mrs. James S. Dennis and appears in the series of sketches entitled "American Heroes on Mission Fields," published by the American Tract Society, 10 East 23d Street, New York.

